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ABSTRACT

In 1996, New Jersey's Hudson County Community College (HCCC) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. The primary goal of HCCC's project was to provide reading materials and writing assignments that will help students in developmental courses develop college-level skills while reinforcing their knowledge of American culture. Specific objectives included developing a course anthology of readings on eight topics, an oral history project, and faculty development workshops. Much progress has been made in the collection of materials for the developmental English course anthology. Both full-length texts and shorter articles and chapters suitable for developmental students have been selected and some have been field-tested in the classroom. The Oral History component of the project was integrated into a Basic English II class. Three team members also gave faculty development workshops. Despite these advances, it will take some time before the complete curriculum package is available for faculty members; various components will be implemented as they become available, however. Copyrights still need to be researched on some materials and a course management package needs to be designed. Although there is consensus that an American identity exists, student ideas about how it is constituted are often vague. (HAA)

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Progress Report

1. Located in Jersey City and West New York, New Jersey, and established in 1974, Hudson County Community College enrolls a richly diverse student body(48% Hispanic, 19% African-American, 16% White, 12% Asian, 5% other). Hudson County is an urban community college located in a center of immigration, so its students are both newly arrived in America and long-time residents. HCCC offers 21 degree programs enrolling approximately 4,000 students in a variety of terminal and transfer degrees. An additional 2,000 students a year take continuing education courses at HCCC.

2. HCCC's Action Plan focuses on students in developmental Basic English I and II courses. Many of our entering students - both native-born Americans and immigrants - place in developmental courses in reading, writing and mathematics. The primary goal of the team's project is to provide reading materials and writing assignments that will help these students develop college-level skills while reinforcing their knowledge of American culture. Specific objectives are to develop a course anthology of readings on eight specific topics such as Colonial America, Slavery and the Civil War, The New Immigration, and the Frontier in America. Also

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included in the plan is the development of an oral history project and presentation of faculty development workshops.

3. Much progress has been made in the collection of materials for the developmental English course anthology. Both full-length texts and shorter articles and chapters suitable for developmental students have been selected and some have been field-tested in the classroom. For example, Professor Rosie Soy's Basic English II course featured various readings focusing on the issues of American identity as seen through the eyes of Americans of different ethnicities in Elizabeth Wong's short story, "The Struggle to Be An All-American Girl," Deairich Hunter's story of an African American teenager's high school life in Brooklyn, New York in "Ducks vs. Hard Rocks" and two novels by immigrants - Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers and Esmeralda Santiago's When I Was Puerto Rican. Barry Tomkins' class also studied Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers as an example of the immigrant experience in the United States, especially the conflict in values between the younger "Americanizing" generation and those of the "old country," a conflict well known to many of our students.

Professor Jani Decena-White piloted the Oral History component of the project in her Basic English II class. Students evolved methods and tools for interviewing, using team member Barry Tomkins, himself an immigrant, as a willing subject. Students worked in collaborative groups to determine what questions to ask, revising and writing up the interview and also doing a follow-up interview. The project focuses on the subject's own personal history as it relates to the question of American identity.

Three team members also gave Faculty Development Workshops: Rosie Soy on "Integrating Asian-American Literature into the Curriculum"; George Satterfield on "Social History Documents Across the Humanities" and Jani Decena-White on "Our Story," the oral history project.

4. There have been no obstacles in implementing the Action Plan. Professor Charles Errico, the team mentor, gave excellent advice, and the faculty and administration at HCCC have been very supportive. However, as the project is broad in scope, it will take some time before the complete curriculum package is available for faculty members at HCCC though various components will be implemented as they become available.

5. Copyrights need to be researched on some materials and a course management package needs to be designed.

6. The responses of students and colleagues to the questions following have been varied:

* What does it mean to be an American?

Although there is consensus that an American identity exists, ideas about how it is constituted are often vague. In Rosie Soy's class, most responded that an American means someone usually born in this country or naturalized if an immigrant. A number of people of color pointed out conflicts between their own view of themselves as American and their rejection as Americans by other members of American society. Interestingly, writing on the

topic "Should English be the required language in the workplace?" many students approved of an English-only rule despite their own second-language background.

* What divides us?

This question brought many responses related to cultural difference such as prejudice and discrimination, intolerance, resentment against immigrants, cultural and racial hatreds and fears, and stereotyping.

* What brings us together?

Responses included the desire to provide a better life for oneself and a better education for one's children, and being sensitive and appreciative of other cultures and heritages while admiring and celebrating American values such as civil liberty.

* What do we have in common?

This yielded answers similar to those in response to "What brings us together?" Many students and colleagues pointed out that the notion of an American identity related not to commonality of background or experience, but to what Americans share across boundaries of gender, race and ethnicity, a core of values tied to democracy and personal freedom.

George Satterfield
Rosie Soy
Barry Tomkins
Jani Decena-White